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TAGS: [ECON](#) [SOC](#) [UNDP](#) [UNGA](#) [CB](#)

SUBJECT: CAMBODIAN RESPONSE TO DISTRACTED DRIVING DEMARCHE

REF: STATE 6703

1. SUMMARY. ESTHoff delivered Reftel demarche to the directors of the Ministry of Public Works and Transport's (MPWT) Department of Transport and the Ministry of Interior's (MOI) Public Order Department. Text messaging and cell phone use while driving are common in Cambodia but are not viewed by the government as high-priority road safety concerns when compared to other frequent unsafe practices such as vehicle overloading or the failure to use helmets on motorcycles or seatbelts in cars. Cambodia's 2007 Land Traffic Law officially bans use of telephones while driving unless they are part of the vehicle's communications equipment, but traffic police rarely enforce this rule. END SUMMARY.

2. DATA ON FATALITIES, INJURIES, OR CRASHES: The government is still compiling final statistics for 2009, but a 2008 report by the MPWT, MOI, and Ministry of Health (MOH) stated that Cambodia has the highest fatality rate per 10,000 registered vehicles among the ten ASEAN member countries. In that year, there were 25,796 road traffic casualties and 1,638 fatalities, resulting from 10,015 crashes. The number of road traffic fatalities has almost doubled over the last five years. Motorcycle users accounted for the vast majority of casualties and fatalities (77% and 68%, respectively).

3. There is little available data on the number of crashes specifically due to text messaging or cell phone use. According to the MPWT, in 2008 there were 53 accidents caused specifically by cell phone use. However, road safety studies say that 98% of crashes were due to human error, and given the prevalence of cell phone use while driving, it is likely that more accidents could be linked to phone use. The top three causes for traffic fatalities were speeding, alcohol abuse, and failure to wear helmets, followed by vehicle overloading, failure to respect right of way and dangerous overtaking. (NOTE: Most Cambodian roads, including national highways, are only two lanes and are traveled by all manner of vehicles, pedestrians, and in rural areas by animals. END NOTE.) Preliminary statistics for 2009 show the same trends.

3. AWARENESS OR EDUCATION CAMPAIGNS: There is no awareness campaign focused on text messaging or cell phone use, as the priority areas are helmet use, drunk driving, and speeding, although a leaflet produced by Handicap International Belgium, which works with the MPWT and MOI on road safety issues, includes notes on mobile phone use while driving. In 2009 the MOI launched a nationwide campaign requiring motorcyclists to wear helmets and use rearview mirrors, and for car passengers to use seatbelts. The MOI reported that in January 2010 alone, traffic police fined 14,269 motorbike drivers for not wearing helmets. MPWT officials claim a 70-80% compliance during the daytime with helmet laws since the awareness campaigns went into effect, a marked improvement from only one year ago.

4. EFFECTIVENESS OF LAWS, LAW ENFORCEMENT: Traffic police

rarely enforce rules on cell phone use while driving, and while enforcement of helmet and seatbelt rules is improving, police are only posted during daytime hours, so nighttime accident and fatality rates have remained high. The public also widely considers traffic police to be corrupt; when stopped, offenders can typically bribe their way out of a ticket.

15. PREVALENCE OF TEXT MESSAGING/CELL USE: According to the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications and the 2008 census, Cambodia has 5.5 million cell phone subscribers, or one phone for every three Cambodians. There are nine cell phone service providers, only four of which operate nationwide. Text messaging, or Short Messaging Service (SMS), is popular among cell phone users in Cambodia due to their relatively low cost compared to making phone calls, even though most cell phones do not have a Khmer-script keypad.

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